



## ensuring children's safety

*A new environmental program recognizes the state's safest child-care facilities*

Indiana is helping to keep children in day care safe from pesticides and other chemicals. Recognizing that many childhood problems such as hyperactivity, learning disabilities and asthma are directly related to environmental hazards, the Indiana Department of Environmental Management has created the 5-Star Environmental Recognition Program for Child Care Facilities. The program is part of the state's commitment to giving all children, from birth to age 4, the opportunity to develop their greatest potential.

Many childhood behaviors, such as crawling on the floor, placing objects in mouths and playing in the dirt, expose children to environmental risks. Children are more susceptible than adults to problems in the environment. Because most brain development occurs before age 4 and 100,000 children are placed in child-care facilities each day in Indiana, IDEM has created the 5-Star program to recognize facilities that reduce health threats. Under the program, the agency rates the safety of facilities based on a 5-star system.

To find out whether the program was needed, IDEM surveyed several child-care facilities in various socioeconomic sectors across the state. When the agency asked directors and staff of the facilities about environmental hazards, it learned many of them had never received any training on these types of threats.

To get a rating from the program, child-care facilities must fill out an application and receive an IDEM staff person for an on-site visit. A review committee made up of representatives from IDEM, Family and Social Services Administration, state Department of Health, various child-care

facilities, local health departments and parents then meet to decide how many stars the facility should get. After a facility receives star recognition, IDEM arranges for media coverage to let everyone in the community know a facility has gone above and beyond in providing a healthy environment for children.

The 5-Star Environmental Recognition Program not only recognizes safe facilities, it also provides assistance to facilities that need to make improvements. If a facility needs immediate on-site assistance, IDEM personnel visit and assess its situation.

Paula Smith, director of the Office of Planning and Assessment in IDEM, said one of the 5-Star program's greatest strengths is that it costs child-care facilities virtually nothing. There is no application fee, and IDEM contracts with a laboratory to provide risk assessments. Brochures, videos and other promotional items about the program are provided to the facilities at no charge.

Since the creation of the 5-Star program, 66 facilities have earned recognition. All of them have implemented pest management using baits and traps rather than pesticides. Four are among the first in the nation to participate in a pilot program studying the effectiveness of such pest management at child-care facilities.

The 5-Star Environmental Recognition Program is also a model in terms of col-

laboration and partnership, both across state agencies and between the public and private sectors. Because IDEM does not license and regulate child-care facilities, it works with the agency that does, the Family and Social Services Administration. Other partners include parents, children's associations, solid-waste-management districts and the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration.


The 5-Star Environmental Recognition Program is highly transferable to other states, Smith said. New legislation was not required to implement it. "Existing rules and regulations may be different in other states, requiring minor adjustments to the program," she said. All promotional and informational materials are available from IDEM.

The program's biggest impact, Smith said, is that children are becoming aware of hazards and telling their parents. "This program has educated chil-



*Above: Indiana First Lady Judy O'Bannon, left, visited children at Robin's Nest Child Care Center, a 5-Star facility. Volunteer Mr. Sam, center, participated. Top left: Kathleen Hruby, director of My School in Crown Point, Ind., received a 5-Star plaque from IDEM Office Director Adriane Blasiesing.*

dren by day and by night. Kids come home and point to things that may not be safe," she said.

For more information about the 5-Star Environmental Recognition Program, contact Paula Smith, director, Office of Planning and Assessment, at (317) 233-1210, or visit the program's Web site at [www.state.in.us/idem/kids](http://www.state.in.us/idem/kids). 

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